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THE SECOND THULE EXPEDITION TO NORTHERN GREENLAND, 1916-1918

Among the twentieth-century Arctic explorers the name of Knud Rasmussen is one of the best known. Half Eskimo, half white, he has known how to travel and live in the native way as no other man has learned it except Stefánsson. His second "Thule" expedition, just completed, is worthy of the first. On this journey, in 1912, he had established the connection of Peary Land with the main mass of Greenland by explorations at the head of Independence Fiord on the eastern side of northern Greenland.[1] *To reach the head of the fiord he had crossed the entire breadth of Greenland over the inland ice.*

On the present journey Rasmussen accomplished the equally bold feat of skirting the margin of northwestern Greenland, partly along the land fringe, partly on the inland ice. He penetrated deep fiords under extremely hazardous conditions of travel, with little game to be found, and returned to Etah in a starving condition, having lost two of his men—one, Olsen, by accident, and another, Dr. Wulff, through starvation.

The information that he was able to gather on this last journey about Eskimo migrations and on the physical and plant and animal geography of the coast is worthy of a place beside the best researches in Polar exploration. A summary of the results was published in the Geografisk Tidskrift *of Copenhagen (Vol. 24, 1917-18, No. 6, pp. 215-232) and is here translated and condensed by the editors for the* Geographical Review. *The present article contains the narrative of the expedition; a second article, to appear in the next issue, will deal with the scientific results.*

NARRATIVE OF THE EXPEDITION

By KNUD RASMUSSEN

The Second Thule Expedition[2] started April 1, 1916, from Copenhagen on the steamship *Hans Egede* for the purpose of carrying out one of two projected plans: (1) the examination and mapping of the large fiords on the northern coast of Greenland or (2) the examination and mapping of Melville Bay. By staying longer in Greenland than intended the expedition succeeded in carrying out both projects.

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[1] Knud Rasmussen: Report of the First Thule Expedition, 1912, *Meddelelser om Grønland*, Vol. 51, No. 8 (=pp. 285-340), Copenhagen, 1915 (reviewed in the *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 2, 1916, pp. 65-66; see also the article "The Non-Existence of Peary Channel" in the *Review*, Vol. 1, pp. 448-452).

[2] A preliminary note, by W. E. Ekblaw, on the Second Thule Expedition appeared in the September, 1918, *Review*, p. 286.—EDIT. NOTE.

Exploration of Melville Bay

The expedition went ashore at Godthaab on April 18. While the airline distance from there to Melville Bay is only 11 degrees (64° N. to 75° N.) the unfavorable ice conditions lengthened our actual voyage to nearly 2,250 kilometers. The journey was made by boat and sledge. It was hard going in northern Greenland on account of the mild winter and an early spring which resulted in our having neither real winter ice nor open water. For long distances there was great difficulty with the sledges. With the help of buoys these were made amphibious so that they might float in case the ice broke around them, as often happened. Because it was necessary to reach Melville Bay while winter ice was favorable, the march was forced day and night. By June 4 we reached Devils Thumb in Melville Bay.

We spent two weeks, June 4 to June 17, in examining Melville Bay. The members of the expedition who took part in this work were: Lauge Koch, cartographer and geologist; the Greenlander Tobias Gabrielsen, who had been a member of Captain Koch's sledge journey to the northern point of Greenland on the *Danmark* expedition; and the writer, as leader and ethnographer.

Lauge Koch succeeded in mapping Melville Bay completely in its whole extent of about 500 kilometers, while I made a thorough examination of the earlier conditions of habitation, locating more than 50 house ruins. Detailed maps were made of the most important settlements, and measurements taken of the better conserved houses and graves. In order to prevent destruction, warm water was used to uncover objects. The examination of the settlement conditions of Melville Bay procured much material that will be of value in understanding the Eskimo migrations to southern Greenland along this trail.

Local Ethnological Investigations

From July 1 to October 1 various local investigations were carried out by Peter Freuchen, Lauge Koch, and myself in the environs of Thule (on North Star Bay, Wolstenholme Sound). At a later time data will be produced relating to all the old settlements from Cape York to Etah. Koch and Freuchen have made a detailed map of the largest of these settlements, Umanaq in Wolstenholme Sound, that shows about 60 house ruins, a number of graves, many tent rings, meat caches, etc. Many of the ruins were measured.

With the aid of Captain Comer, of the Crocker Land Expedition, a large kitchen-midden was dug out in Umanaq. At the bottom of this was uncovered a layer of whalebone, which proves that the Greenland whale had formed what might be called a culture-base, that has become extinct and even forgotten.

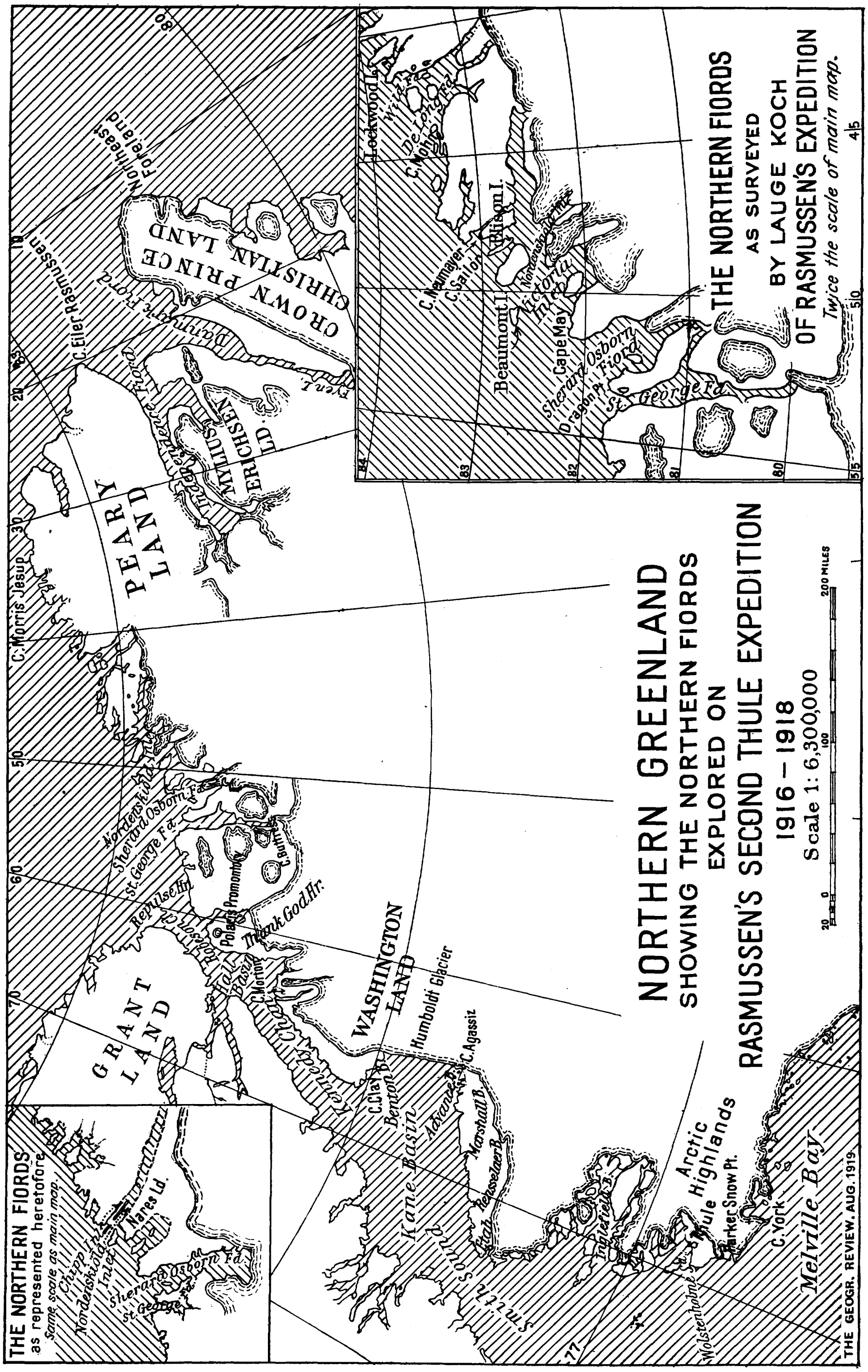

FIG. 1—(For the newly explored parts based on a map by Koch accompanying the article cited in the text.)

THE NORTHERLY EXPEDITION: ITS ORGANIZATION AND OBJECTS

In October, 1916, after the ice had settled, several journeys were made to Melville Bay for the purpose of supplementing the map and ethnic material obtained on the spring journey. But the main object of the expedition was the sledge journey to the northern coast of Greenland, to the large fiords and to Peary Land. This was accomplished from April 6, 1916, to October 20, 1917.

The Second Thule Expedition, like all my earlier voyages, was a "hunting expedition" on which the food had to be procured by hunting, emergency rations only being carried. This I was able to do because of the experience I had gained in 1912 in the Nabo districts on the eastern side of Greenland. I counted especially on seals in the large fiords and musk-oxen on the extensive upland which, on American maps,[3] was shown about the fiords. Eskimos who had traveled with American expeditions at the mouths of the fiords which we wished to enter had informed me that the ice conditions there allowed one to count on seals in June and July. This and my own experience led me to believe that hunting would enable one to prolong a stay. On the upland were musk-oxen also, a circumstance which had enabled Peary in 1900 to save the lives of his comrades by a single hunt near Cape Wohlgemuth.

The members of the more northerly expedition were:

Thorild Wulff, botanist
Lauge Koch, geologist and cartographer
Inukitsoq, Eskimo hunter
Ajago, Eskimo hunter
Nasaitordluarsuk, called "Boatman," Eskimo hunter
Hendrik Olsen, South Greenlander, late member of the *Danmark* expedition of 1906-1908
Knud Rasmussen, leader and ethnographer.

It was planned: (1) to map the large hitherto unexamined fiords: St. George Fiord, Sherard Osborne Fiord, Victoria Inlet, Nordenskiöld Inlet, Chipp Inlet, and De Long Fiord; (2) to make a botanical and geological examination of these districts, the most northerly land on earth; (3) to make an ethnographical examination of traces of an earlier Eskimo migration northward around Greenland to the eastern coast.

All these objects were accomplished. Very important geological and botanical collections were brought home, and the ethnographical examination failed to disclose any signs of an earlier settlement.

From Thule to the district of our work is more than 1,000 kilometers. In order to cover this ground as quickly as possible, we started with large and strong teams, a total of 6 sledges and 72 dogs. On the first part of the journey extra sledges were employed to carry the heavy narwhal and walrus meat to be used as provision for us and the dogs until we reached Nordenskiöld Inlet. Like my first expedition this was organized entirely in Eskimo style and based on their technique of journeying. Stress was laid on ammunition and whaling and sealing gear. Nearly 130 pounds of pemmican were destined merely for use on the return trip over the inland ice.

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[3] The standard representation is: Baffin Bay to Lincoln Sea, Polar Regions, showing the recent discoveries by Civil Engineer R. E. Peary, etc., 1:1,400,000, U. S. Hydrographic Office Chart No. 2142, Washington, 1903.—EDIT. NOTE.

At the start of the expedition we had 27 sledges and 354 dogs, which were gradually sent home when the amount of provisions and dog food diminished. The last extra sledges left us as far up as Hall's grave near Thank God Harbor.

From Thule to Sherard Osborne Fiord

We started from Thule on April 6 and on April 22 we had already passed Humboldt Glacier and reached Washington Land. At Cape Morton, 81° N., we found an old depot of the *Discovery,* Nares' expedition ship. This depot, abandoned in 1875, consisted of 56 two-pound tins with fresh mutton which we enjoyed very much.

From May 2 to May 6 we traveled around the sharp northwestern corner of Greenland through large ice masses, over which we had to make our way with the help of ice-picks. At Repulse Harbor we found a cairn established by Peary in 1900. On May 7 we reached Dragon Point at the mouth of St. George Fiord. A cairn was found here that contained a detailed account by Beaumont, the first explorer in this region. It was dated May 25, 1876. There we placed a depot consisting of 50 pounds of pemmican, 50 pounds of biscuits, 30 pounds of rolled oats, coffee, tea, and sugar, to be used on our return from St. George Fiord. Near Sherard Osborne Fiord we found much deep snow, as was the case later in every fiord we came to. From here the expedition had to travel on foot for several months, as travel with dogs was impossible.

The Northern Fiords

When we reached the large fiords, where our work was to begin, we discovered that the land which was supposed to exist around Victoria Inlet and Nordenskiöld Inlet did not exist at all. This meant that we should not have the expected hunting. We therefore killed half of our dogs as soon as we could afford to do so. On May 19 we observed the first seal on the ice near Dragon Point. This assured us of good hunting, if only we could get ahead far enough during the spring. The work to be accomplished by the expedition required not only time, but also the coming of summer. When mapping the large fiords we had to skid ahead through snow, though this snow had to melt before we could do our botanical work. But even as late as July 1 we were able to proceed only with the help of snowshoes.

From May 8 to June 22 the large fiords from Sherard Osborne Fiord to De Long Fiord were mapped, though we were all the time fighting for food; and from May 6 to July 1 we waded in snow and during July in water, up to the knees. We were convinced that a longer stay here must be disastrous, but all the members agreed to take the risk rather than turn southward with only half our task accomplished.

Only in very few places on the entire journey did we find favorable musk-ox hunting. In a few valleys between Cape May and at the mouth of Victoria Inlet we shot 40 musk-oxen. The great difficulty of traveling with loads prevented us from carrying the musk-ox meat with us. It was only valuable to us in so far as we could eat it on the spot. At all other places on the northern coast we hunted in vain for musk-oxen. Sometimes we shot hare and grouse. But it was difficult to feed our dogs, now numbering 20, which were necessary to draw our collections and provisions.

Long hunting trips were without any results. We should have been obliged to sacrifice our dogs very early, had we not now and then captured a seal. Three of these we discovered at an open stretch or "lead" extending 30 kilometers inside Chipp Inlet, and two others we shot between Cape Neumayer and Cape Mohn. This made it possible for us to map De Long Fiord from June 20 to June 23. This fiord had three main arms, of which the most easterly was the longest. At their heads lies a high, ice-covered upland, where it is not possible for big game to exist. With the mapping of this very interesting fiord the expedition succeeded in proving that no channel exists leading from here toward Independence Fiord in the direction of the formerly supposed Peary Channel.

Results of Our Surveys

Here, at the "farthest north" of the expedition, we will briefly sum up the most important cartographical and geographical results. A comparison of the accompanying sketch map (Fig. 1) with the previous representation of the region (see upper left inset, Fig. 1) shows the following: a large ice-free land around St. George Fiord and ice-covered districts in the direction of Peary Land—exactly the opposite of what was before believed to be the case. So the large ice-free districts around Victoria Inlet and Nordenskiöld Inlet must be eliminated from the map, as the districts shown on the earlier maps as Nares Land are inland ice. Chipp Inlet, which was supposed to run parallel to Nordenskiöld Inlet, does not exist; but north of Nordenskiöld Inlet is a new fiord extending eastward for about 50 kilometers into Peary Land.

Nordenskiöld Inlet, which was believed to form the mouth of the so-called Peary Channel leading to Independence Fiord, proved to be a short fiord, only 20 kilometers long, the head of which ends in a glacier. If Peary believed he was looking into a deep channel, then he made a mistake, which could easily have occurred in passing the fiord at sea, as Peary did. From the outer coast near Cape Sailor one really seems to be looking into a large fiord, because the glacier that forms the head of the fiord is continuous with the fiord ice, and the nunatak hills at the fiord head appear to be a continuation of the land at the mouth of the fiord.

Victoria Inlet also has been taken to be a deep fiord that reached far into the ice-free land. Here, just as in Nordenskiöld Inlet, we have inland ice continuing the sea ice, and, when seen at a distance, this gives rise to incorrect inferences. The head of Sherard Osborne Fiord likewise consists of flowing inland ice, the so-called *sikûssak,* which ascends gradually and ends at the ice cap near Cape Buttress. This flowing inland ice overthrows all the earlier theories that there existed here the means of subsistence for the Eskimo. The manner in which this has affected the problem of migrations around northern Greenland will be treated in detail at another time.

The Return

On our return trip, June 26 to June 30, we managed to kill nine seals near Cape Sailor (Elison Island). Thus we had food for ourselves and our dogs before we started on the march through water and melting ice to Sherard Osborne Fiord, where we expected to find favorable conditions for seal-hunting. For twelve hours a day during one month we were wet up to our waists, but we had to go on, because St. George Fiord was the only place where we could ascend the inland ice. In order to preserve our collections and films from destruction by water, we had to build platforms on our sledges. The ice of Sherard Osborne Fiord was in splendid condition, and only when we had to go ashore, near Dragon Point, to fetch provisions from the depot for our return trip, did we observe that the abundance of melted ice during the last three weeks had caused a wide belt of open water to form between the land and the fiord ice. In this water were all the seals; but they did not come upon the ice as they are in the habit of doing everywhere else in Greenland at this time of the year. There was no use shooting them in the water because they went down like stones when hit.[4] Thus we managed to kill but two seals in a region in which we had expected to have the best hunting before we came to the inland ice. On land, near the place where we ascended the inland ice, we found only now and then a wolf, and these never came within the range of our rifles.

Death of Olsen

The expedition was now to lose the Greenlander Hendrik Olsen, who perished through unknown circumstances on a hare-hunting trip 20 kilometers south of Dragon Point on July 21. After waiting and searching four days in vain, we continued our journey, to stop again for twelve days 35 kilometers distant from the place where we should have met Hendrik. On the 24th we agreed that it was impossible to stay longer at that place, where we were unable to find food for ourselves and our dogs. Cairns were placed at three different locations containing letters, maps, clothing, and provisions.

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[4] In this connection it is interesting to refer to the section on "Hunting Seals in Open Water" in Stefánsson's article in the May *Review* (Vol. 7, 1919), pp. 301-302 and Figs. 6 and 7.—Edit. Note.

We can only guess the manner in which Hendrik perished. He may have drowned in a river or may have shot himself accidentally by falling into a crevasse or may have been attacked while asleep by a wolf, of which we observed a great many in this region. We were all very much moved by the loss of our dear comrade, and, before we left St. George Fiord, we built a cairn at which I made a speech in Danish and Greenlandish.

Dearth of Food

To add to the depression caused by the loss of our friend came other obstacles of a serious nature. We were starving in a deserted region where storms, rain, and thickening snow hindered our march to the inland ice, whence we were to start our journey homeward. We were able to find food from day to day, but there remained the problem of procuring reserve provisions for our long march over the inland ice, the shortest route and the only one possible for the transport of our scientific collections. It would have been impossible to carry them south over the snowless and rough coastland.

To be sure we had a few portions of meat left from our successful hunting near Cape May and the two seals we shot in St. George Fiord, besides 48 pounds of pemmican, about 40 pounds of biscuits, and about 20 pounds of rolled oats, coffee, and tea. But we starved in order to save our provisions for the journey over the inland ice. Though we killed a few dogs we had fourteen left for the two sledges.

The distance we had to cover over the inland ice to the nearest land south of Humboldt Glacier was 435 kilometers, which would not have been difficult had we been in good form with sufficient provisions. We had pemmican, biscuits, and rolled oats for 16 days on half rations. The seal meat and musk-ox meat that should have been our food we had to use to feed our dogs. In our run-down condition we did not wish to draw the sledges ourselves. The muscles of our legs were very weak from wading through ice-water during the month of June. Our meat, used as dog food, would last ten days, and, after our own provisions gave out, we could live on the dogs.

South Over the Inland Ice

On August 5 the weather became clear, and we started over the inland ice with all our materials and provisions stored on the sledges. Our hope of getting quickly to the land south of Humboldt Glacier was not realized, for after three days we came to a deep cleft, which we named "Djaevlekløften" (Devil's Cleft). It took us two days to get to the other side of this crack, formed by steep nunatak rocks. After another two days we arrived at a snowless plain, 20 to 30 kilometers in width, that reached from

St. George Fiord to Sherard Osborne Fiord and therefore could not be flanked. Again we lost two costly days by carrying our baggage and also the sledges to the main ice cap, which we reached on August 10. From then to the 21st we had easy going. We traveled as fast as we could and, in spite of being underfed, covered 35 kilometers daily on an average. On August 21, having eaten our last provisions, we sighted the land south of Humboldt Glacier 30 kilometers distant with still five dogs on which to subsist.

This was our position when in the afternoon there came a southwest wind with rain. Thereupon the ice broke up on the numerous rivers near Humboldt Glacier, and the streams became torrents. We fought these for four days. Tied to each other with seal straps, transporting our collections and materials over the slippery ground, we traveled by devious ways. Wading in wet clothes all day made us very weak, especially as we now lived only on dog meat, which was not very nourishing. Finally, on the evening of August 24, we reached Cape Agassiz, on the very day when we had eaten our last dog.

Arrival at Cape Agassiz

Our arrival here meant safety. The region is known to the Eskimos under the name Qaqaitsut, "the land without hills," and is visited every fall by reindeer and hare hunters from Etah and its environs. We observed quite a number of hare. Our three Eskimos went for a hunt, and Ajago returned after a few hours with five hare, while the other two Eskimos continued to follow the fresh trails of reindeer. Our fight for food seemed to be over, and now we had to get in communication with mankind as soon as possible. We had no clothing or ammunition for a longer stay, and had to be careful to reach in time the ship which we expected to find waiting for us near Etah.

We decided that Ajago and I, who were less weak than the others, should head for Etah, 225 kilometers distant, in order to organize a relief expedition. Both Wulff and Koch were in very bad shape, but we left with them two clever hunters, Inukitsoq and Nasaitordluarsuk, to provide food. The country here is made up of many rock hollows, cut by clefts and filled with small lakes. Since it would be difficult to find our friends in such a place, we decided that they should travel slowly forward to the large lake behind Marshall Bay, known to all Eskimos, where we could easily find them. Ajago and I left Wulff and Koch on August 25, before Inukitsoq and Nasaitordluarsuk had returned from their hunting trip.

Relief from Etah

We advanced with very little rest through difficult terrain about 150 kilometers, when, on the afternoon of the 29th, we met the reindeer hunter Miteq from Inglefield Gulf. It was no use returning to our comrades, as

Miteq had provisions for only two or three days and besides we might have missed our friends, as, according to our plans, they would have left our own camp going south. Therefore we did not change our plan, which was to procure effective help as quickly as possible from Etah. We reached Etah on the evening of August 30. During the night five relief sledges with plenty of provisions and necessities started for the rescue of our friends.

On the following day the sledges were on the inland ice and searched the large lake back of Marshall Bay. Here two cairns were to be placed, at which two men were to stay, while the other three should search the land farther north in special directions. The relief sledges found our comrades on September 4 after a two-day journey north of the large lake, but, to our great sorrow, too late to rescue Dr. Wulff, who had died under the terrible strain of the voyage. The death of our friend moved us very much. All of us, and especially Dr. Wulff, had been convinced that our arrival at Inglefield Land meant the rescue of the whole party.

DEATH OF DR. WULFF

But after Ajago and I had left Koch and Wulff, it developed that Dr. Wulff was much weaker than he appeared to be at our departure. He had always been in good condition, even when we lived on half rations, but when we had to use dog-meat as food, he grew weak. In spite of this I believe he would have pulled through, if he had not suffered from lack of blood in the brain and pains in the heart. Then he wrote his last letter to me and died. The letter, which I received through Koch, begins:

> My dear Knud,
>
> The unceasing hunger during the summer and the hardships of the last days have brought me down and taken all my energy, so I am unable to follow Koch and the Eskimo any longer. As their rescue depends on a quick advance to favorable hunting grounds, I should only be a burden. Therefore, in full possession of my faculties, I say good-by and thank you for your comradeship during the expedition. I hope that all of you, as well as the results of the expedition, may be saved.

These words may well serve as his own epitaph and may, together with his excellent botanical materials, preserve his name as long as there exists on earth an interest in solving scientific problems.

The relief sledges brought Koch, Inukitsoq, and Nasaitordluarsuk to the Eskimo settlement at Etah, where we remained in order to gain strength, so as to be able to continue our voyage in the course of the fall or winter to Holstenborg. Thence we intended to sail for home by the Royal Greenland commercial steamer *Hans Egede.*